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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

Conceptual framework of a programme for the preparation and observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 47/5 of 16 October 1992, the General Assembly decided to observe the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons.* In its resolution 48/98 of 20 December 1993, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to draft a conceptual framework of a programme for the preparation and observance of the Year to be submitted to it at its fiftieth session, through the Commission for Social Development.

2. The present report has been prepared in response to those resolutions and in keeping with the Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/67 of 25 July 1980 on the observance of international years and anniversaries.

II. BACKGROUND

3. By the end of the century, 20 years will have been added to the average life. Longevity is one of the great achievements of the twentieth century which, together with declining fertility, is producing a dramatic ageing of the world's population. The ageing of populations has commenced at different times in different countries and is proceeding at varying rates. Generally, however, in the course of a few generations, the proportion of older persons, those aged 60 and above, is increasing from approximately 1 in 14 to 1 in 4.

4. Recognizing ageing as one of the major achievements and, at the same time, challenges of the twentieth century, the United Nations convened the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, and, in the same year, the General Assembly endorsed the International Plan of Action on Ageing (resolution 37/51). In 1990, the Assembly designated 1 October as the International Day for the Elderly (resolution 45/106), and one year later, in 1991, it adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (resolution 46/91). In 1992, the Assembly adopted a practical strategy for the decade 1992-2001 entitled "global targets on ageing for the year 2001" (resolution 47/86).

5. Observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 is the next stage in the evolution of the United Nations programme on ageing. In elaborating the conceptual framework of a programme for the Year, four dimensions emerged: the situation of older persons; the life-long individual development; multi-generational relationships; and the relationship between development and the ageing of populations.

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* The term "older person" rather than "elderly" is being used in the present report, as it was in General Assembly resolutions 47/5 and 48/98. In Assembly decision 48/433 of 20 December 1993, however, the term "elderly" is used. Clarification of the preferred term for the Year needs to be made at the thirty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development.

6. The four dimensions of ageing are introduced in section IV below for consideration by the Commission and for exploration and elaboration in the coming years, both conceptually and in terms of practical programmes, through broad-based consultations both within and between generations and sectors of society at the local, national, regional and global levels.

7. The broad-based framework that is being proposed would benefit from having a unifying theme, as discussed in section V below, and from an overall objective, as proposed in section III.

III. OBJECTIVE: PROMOTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS PRINCIPLES FOR OLDER PERSONS

8. It is proposed that the overall objective of the Year should be the promotion of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, their translation into policy, as well as practical programmes and actions.

9. The 18 Principles are organized in five clusters: independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

10. The independence Principles state that older persons need access to basic services and care, opportunities to work or make income, ability to influence the pace of withdrawal from the labour force, access to education and training opportunities, safe living environments and support to reside at home for as long as possible.

11. The participation Principles address decision-making, dissemination of knowledge, community service and the formation of movements or associations of older persons.

12. The care Principles address issues of family and community care, access to health, social and legal services, and matters pertaining to institutional care.

13. The self-fulfilment Principles call for older persons to have opportunities for full development of their potential and access to educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society.

14. The dignity Principles address issues of exploitation and physical or mental abuse, fair treatment and being valued independently of economic contribution.

15. The translation of the Principles into reality will require both initiative by older persons and the establishment of an enabling environment by the rest of society.

IV. FRAMEWORK

16. The four dimensions of a broad conceptual framework within which the United Nations Principles for Older Persons could be promoted are introduced briefly

below with a view to fostering society-wide consultations on their meaning for different generations and sectors of society.

A. Situation of older persons

> "... the transition to a positive, active and developmentally oriented view of ageing may well result from action by elderly people themselves, through the sheer force of their growing numbers and influence. The collective consciousness of being elderly, as a socially unifying concept, can in that way become a positive factor" (International Plan of Action on Ageing, 1/ para. 32).

17. The Plan of Action discusses the multi-dimensional nature of ageing. It draws attention to the potential of older persons to take action in ensuring a positive and developmentally oriented view of old age. It points to the need for policies and programmes to reflect the aspirations of older persons, for example, by permitting a balance of material and spiritual well-being. The Plan of Action lists 62 recommendations for action in the areas, inter alia, of education, employment and income security, housing and the environment, health and hygiene, social welfare and the family. These recommendations have been expressed in more operational terms in the global targets on ageing for the year 2001 (A/47/339, sect. III).

18. Among the sectoral issues, ensuring the means of livelihood and income security for older persons has become a major concern for all countries. The economic situation of older persons is affected in many places by loosening attachments to the workforce, skills obsolescence, devaluation of savings and pensions, and old-age as well as family and society-wide poverty. In this context, the situation of older women gives rise to particular concern as they tend to live longer than men do and with fewer resources and societal entitlements.

19. Pre-industrial societies, though constrained in other ways, generally provide older persons with multiple and meaningful roles. In post-industrial societies, as they become more service and information-oriented, roles resembling those prevailing in traditional societies can often be recovered in form, if not content. These may include, for example, participation in micro-enterprises and cooperatives, modern applications of traditional healing; cultural transmission in kindergartens, schools and universities; advisory services; and, in situations of conflict, active roles as mediators and counsellors.

20. In developing policies for the older population, its heterogeneity must be borne in mind, as must the particular circumstances of certain groups of older persons, such as migrants, refugees, older persons without families, destitute elders and the frail. Frail older persons, for example, require a continuum of care from home-help, which supports "ageing in place", to institutional care, when independent living is no longer possible.

21. In preparing for the Year, the discussion and specific measures outlined in the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the global targets on ageing for

the year 2001 may serve as catalysts for practical actions supporting the independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older persons as stated in the Principles.

B. Life-long individual development

"Ageing is a life-long process and should be recognized as such. Preparation of the entire population for the later stages of life should be an integral part of social policies and encompass physical, psychological, cultural, religious, spiritual, economic, health and other factors" (International Plan of Action on Ageing, para. 25 (i)).

22. Ageing of the individual in the strict sense means growing old. It can also signify life-long growth and development in physical, economic, psychological, cultural, spiritual and other ways. The expectation of active participation in later years can positively influence personal development choices made earlier in life.

23. Individual development through the different stages of the life cycle requires both individual initiative and an enabling environment. Individual development can be viewed as a process of interaction between the individual and society which can be mutually beneficial. At the individual level, this implies conscious effort to combine individual independence with contributory/participatory behaviour, while striving towards self-development through life-long education, upgrading of skills and healthy lifestyles. Society, for its part, needs to accord equal importance to the challenges of each stage of the life cycle.

24. Accomplishments and life skills developed earlier in life can compensate in many ways for some, mainly physical, limitations that are experienced in old age. Such limitations can be mitigated by a supportive environment of family, community and society at large.

25. When the majority of individuals can pursue life-long individual development, an ageing population can reach maturity not only in terms of demography, but also of intellect and emotion. This would help to ensure, among other things, that the years added to life could be infused with a new sense of purpose and liveliness appreciated at both individual and collective levels.

C. Multi-generational relationships

"The respect and care for the elderly, which has been one of the few constants in human culture everywhere, reflects a basic interplay between self-preserving and society-preserving impulses which has conditioned the survival and progress of the human race" (International Plan of Action on Ageing, para. 27).

26. Traditional self-preserving and society-preserving impulses are being challenged by demographic trends and other societal changes, giving rise to a

need for new intergenerational exchanges in the family, local community and national society, including in the areas of care-giving, income security and cultural definition.

27. The family is the first and most intimate level of multi-generational relationship, where all tend to invest in one another and share in the fruits of that investment; it has been termed the "first resource and last resort" for its members. Families, however, are experiencing demographic, cultural and socio-economic changes with implications for intra-familial relationships, including in care-giving. The changes both challenge and bring opportunities to multi-generational relationships.

28. Communities can facilitate multi-generational relationships, both within neighbourhoods and between special interest groups. Though undergoing change, the neighbourhood community is usually age-integrated, making interactions between its younger and older members a matter of daily routine. Communities of special interest, such as organizations of elders or youth, can establish new relationships in addressing community concerns such as safety, environmental protection, cultural enrichment, income-generation and others. Communities can also facilitate communications between younger and older generations, particularly in the exchange of new and old technologies and new and traditional lifestyles.

29. At the national level, many developed countries are currently revising multi-generational exchanges, including the provision of social insurance and pensions, underscoring the importance for countries which are ageing later to develop their own appropriate national-level exchanges between the generations to ensure a multi-generational consensus within society.

D. Development and the ageing of populations

> "Countries should recognize and take into account their demographic trends and changes in the structure of their populations in order to optimize their development" (International Plan of Action on Ageing, para. 13).

30. Demographic ageing affects the size and proportion of the various cohorts, changing young and old dependency ratios and the size of the working population. As a consequence, employment, social security, social welfare, education and health care, as well as investment, consumption and savings patterns, need adjustment.

31. Developed countries, for example, are adjusting macro-level policies for income security in old age, generally introducing a mix of measures encompassing various pension and social security schemes, incentives for life-long saving, and flexible work and retirement patterns.

32. Developing countries generally advocate a three-fold approach to income security for older persons: support for their family and community structures; priority to rural development so as to stem the out-migration of youth; and opportunities for older persons to have a means of livelihood, including through

participation in cooperative, micro- or family enterprises and through access to training and credit.

33. Providing adequate income security to older persons is especially challenging in newly industrialized countries where populations have aged rapidly and in countries in transition from central planning where resources and infrastructure are lacking.

34. Macro-level decisions can also help to ensure that the total living environment supports multi-generational exchanges, active ageing in place and a culture of caring from which all benefit, by for example, establishing programmes to support self-help and family care-giving, as well as by encouraging a continuum of housing arrangements from "granny flats" to community-integrated long-term care facilities.

35. In periods of demographic and socio-economic transition, reference to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons can help to ensure that macro-level policies take into account the independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older persons. In preparing for the Year, studies could be undertaken on the integration of ageing into the development plans of countries at varying stages of demographic and socio-economic transition.

V. THEME: TOWARDS A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES

36. Clearly, ageing is a multidimensional, multisectoral and multi-generational issue. It encompasses the situation of older persons, the individual's life-long development, relationships between the generations and the relationship between ageing and the development of society.

37. A suitable theme for the Year, therefore, would be one that encompassed the four dimensions of the framework and allowed for priority to be given to promoting the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, the Year's objective. The concept of a "society for all ages" could provide such an integrative theme.

38. The meaning of "a society for all" has been explored by Member States participating in the World Summit for Social Development at Copenhagen, and is elaborated in the Summit's Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit. A society for all is seen as an inclusive society which must be based upon respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice, democratic participation and the rule of law. Thus, we may think of a society for all as one that adjusts its structures and functioning, as well as its policies and plans, to the needs and capabilities of all, thereby releasing the potential of all, for the benefit of all. A "society for all ages" would, additionally, enable the generations to invest in one another and share in the fruits of that investment, guided by the twin principles of reciprocity and equity.

VI. PRACTICAL PREPARATIONS

A. Activities

39. The all-encompassing theme of "towards a society for all ages" opens the Year wide for the participation of all generations and many sectors and organizations. A society for all ages can be best experienced at the local level, but requires the support of a national debate and a programme of practical activities encompassing, for example, the promotion of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons within the proposed four-dimensional conceptual framework. Regional and global activities could facilitate, inter alia, the exchange of information and experiences, thereby acting as a catalyst for good practices and innovations in responding to the ageing of population while generating awareness of the possibilities ahead of a "new age for old age".

40. To promote collaboration among the many actors who could participate in observing the Year, Governments and local authorities, as well as intergovernmental and major non-governmental organizations, may wish to appoint focal points or collaborative committees for the Year.

41. The Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, serving as the global focal point for the Year, will facilitate consultations on the objective, framework and theme of the Year as a contribution to the debate in the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session and the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, in 1997.

42. The Department will devote its mandated activities on ageing, such as publications and surveys, to preparations for the Year. As resources permit, the Department will maintain a database of the main actors and activities in order to promote exchange of experience and to facilitate monitoring. The Department will endeavour to engage the support of all the actors traditionally involved in issues concerning ageing, including ministries and national mechanisms on ageing, organizations of older persons and gerontological research institutes. Efforts will also be made to engage non-traditional actors such as enterprises, trade unions, foundations, youth organizations, the media, mayors and leading citizens (such as goodwill ambassadors for the Year).

43. Immediately after the thirty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development, the Department will host an informal meeting of interested United Nations agencies and bodies to explore individual and joint initiatives for the Year. This meeting will launch a continuing consultative process within the United Nations system on preparations for the Year.

44. The Department will disseminate the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, together with suggestions for their translation, distribution, publication, discussion in the media, schools and community centres, as well as their possible use in policy and programme development.

45. To promote action for improving the situation of older persons (the first of the four facets of the framework) the Department will disseminate the short guide for setting national targets (A/47/339, sect. IV), which is a compendium

of 38 measures recommended in the areas of infrastructure, health and nutrition, housing and living environment, family, education and media, social welfare, employment and income security.

46. The Department will generate a debate and, as resources permit, studies on "life-long ageing" and multi-generational relationships, including through the medium of the Bulletin on Ageing, with, as available, the assistance of research institutes and organizations.

47. The third edition of the World Ageing Situation, to be issued in 1997 in response to General Assembly resolution 41/96 of 4 December 1986, will explore the relationship of ageing and development in countries at different stages of socio-economic and demographic development as an aid to integrating ageing into development plans.

48. By focusing its ongoing activities towards the objective, framework and theme of the Year, as outlined above, the Department will assist Member States and organizations in launching their own programmes for the Year. This approach will enable the Secretariat to promote the Year while staying within the regular budget, in keeping with the decision of the General Assembly that funding for the Year should be from the regular programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 and by voluntary contributions (resolution 47/5).

49. Member States and organizations are invited to support observance of the Year through contributions to the Trust Fund for Ageing or the Banyan Fund Association: A World Fund for Ageing, or through contributions in kind, such as staffing to assist in maintaining a central reporting and monitoring function. Monitoring and evaluation of the Year could form the basis of a follow-up programme for the decade 2001-2010 for review by the General Assembly in 2001.

50. Since the activities proposed for the Year fit within the mandates of several international funds, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), these and other entities will be invited to consider ways and means of supporting the Year.

51. Early indications suggest that the Year will be well supported. Already, some 60 contributions were made to the present report from 25 countries, including national mechanisms on ageing and non-governmental organizations. Several responses were made on behalf of global constituencies of professional and other groups. One organization of older persons has already established a global network entitled "Coalition 99" to generate a dialogue and action for the Year.

B. Global targets on ageing for the year 2001

52. The practical strategy which the General Assembly adopted in 1992 entitled "global targets on ageing for the year 2001" (comprising global and national sections) provides a useful organizational tool at the global level for supporting regional, national and local actions. The constituent elements of the global targets can help to facilitate collaboration among many actors; these

elements include enabling steps, lists of entities involved, suggestions for resource mobilization, and evaluation and reporting measures. The eight global targets can be adapted to support the objective, framework and theme of the Year. They are:

1. Support countries in setting national targets on ageing.

2. Generate support for integrating ageing into national and international development plans and programmes.

3. Generate support for community-based programmes of care and participation of older persons.

4. Improve cross-national research on ageing, including harmonization of terminology and methodology.

5. Include an item on ageing in international events and meetings of relevance.

6. Establish a global network of senior volunteers for social and economic development.

7. Facilitate closer cooperation among non-governmental organizations on ageing.

8. Facilitate closer cooperation among intergovernmental organizations on ageing.

C. Timetable

53. Current and mandated activities of the United Nations programme on ageing are listed below, briefly, adjusted to the needs of the International Year of Older Persons and responsive to other international events being observed in the meantime:

1995

- Conceptual framework of a programme for the preparation and observance of the International Year of Older Persons presented to the General Assembly after deliberation at the thirty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development, to be held from 10 to 20 April.

- Inter-agency Meeting on Ageing, 21 April.

- Consultations of non-governmental organizations, ongoing.

- Observance of the International Day for the Elderly, 1 October (themes: fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and older women).

- Bulletin on Ageing (theme: Fourth World Conference on Women: situation of older women).

1996

- Global dissemination of the recommendations of the General Assembly for observing the Year, together with the survey for the fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, February.

- Observance of the International Day for the Elderly, 1 October (theme: poverty and old age in the context of International Year for the Eradication of Poverty).

- Inter-agency Meeting on Ageing, date to be determined.

- Issue of the Bulletin on Ageing (theme: poverty and old age).

- Consultations of non-governmental organizations, ongoing.

1997

- The General Assembly reviews the programme for observing the International Year of Older Persons.

- The General Assembly receives the fourth review of implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, conducted by the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session.

- Observance of the International Day for the Elderly, 1 October (theme: multi-generational relationships).

- Bulletin on Ageing (theme: life-long ageing and multi-generational relationships).

- Inter-agency Meeting on Ageing, date to be determined.

- Consultations of non-governmental organizations, ongoing.

- World Ageing Situation, third edition (proposed theme: integrating ageing into development, world-wide challenge)

1998

- Launching of the programme of observances for the International Year of Older Persons.

- International Day for the Elderly, 1 October: launching of the global information campaign for the International Year of Older Persons.

- Inter-agency Meeting on Ageing, date to be determined.

- Bulletin on Ageing (theme: the International Year of Older Persons).

- Consultations of non-governmental organizations, ongoing.

1999

- The General Assembly receives a progress report on observance of the International Year of Older Persons.

- The Assembly marks the Year in plenary (proposed).

- World conferences of older persons to be convened as political will and resources are raised.

- International Day for the Elderly (theme: International Year of Older Persons).

2001

- The General Assembly evaluates the observance of the International Year of Older Persons, and receives the fifth review of implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing conducted by the Commission for Social Development.

Notes

1/ Report of the World Assembly on Ageing, Vienna, 26 July to 6 August 1982 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.82.I.16), chap. VI, sect. A.